

# PSC 215: Law and the Political Process

## Spring 2017

**Instructor:** Elizabeth Tillman

**Class Hours:** Online

**Classroom:** Online

**Office:** 416 Park Hall

**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesday 3pm – 4pm

**Contact:** [eatillma@buffalo.edu](mailto:eatillma@buffalo.edu)

### I. Course Description and Learning Objectives

The Law and Political Process Seminar provides an introduction to the American legal system. A primary focus is the connection between law and politics. To that end, it examines the nature of judging and judicial decision-making, the organization of the state and federal legal systems, judicial selection, the power and role of the Supreme Court, and the relationship between the courts and the other two branches of government.

### II. Required Readings

The following book is required and available at the University Bookstore:

Mays, Larry G. 2012. *American Courts and the Judicial Process*. Oxford University Press. New York, New York. ISBN#: 978-0-19-973885-4

### III. Course Requirements

It is generally recommended to spend [3 hours per credit hour](#) per week studying, this means spending 9 hours outside of class each week completing readings and assignments. To make the best use of your study time, here are some useful [tips](#). If you are struggling with course material or having difficulty completing the assignments, contact me as soon as possible.

#### Course Updates

- Check your UB email frequently (daily) for updates. Staying on top of class communication is part of your professional responsibility. Updates will also be posted to:
  - UBLearns under the Announcements section
  - The syllabus, which is kept updated on UBLearns
  - Announcements will be made during class to keep students updated

#### Using UBLearns

- Check for updates via the Announcements board
  - **Check that your assignment has fully uploaded/posted.**
- Use the Discussion Board tab to
  - Submit your Discussion Paper/post to the Discussion Board
  - **Check that your assignment has fully uploaded/posted.**
- If you have trouble with UBLearns,
  - **FIRST:** Call or [submit a form online](#) to address the question with the UBLearns support team.

- In the case that you cannot submit to UBLearns by the deadline, email me before the deadline at [eatillma@buffalo.edu](mailto:eatillma@buffalo.edu).
  - **Include (1) a copy of your assignment and (2) a screenshot of the issue you are experiencing on UBLearns.**

The course grades are based on 3 components totaling 100 points.

- Written assignments
  - FIVE Discussion Papers/Posts (30 points total)
- Exams
  - TWO non-cumulative exams (60 points total)
- Overall Performance
  - Class participation/ professionalism component (10 points total)

### 1. Discussion Paper/Posts 30 points (6 points each)

Each chapter will have a critical thinking question associated with it posted on a discussion board on UBLearns. Each student is responsible for FIVE Discussion Papers/Posts responding to this question. These questions will force students to think critically about the subject material within that chapter. The discussion papers/posts are due before the chapter discussion days in class (please refer to the course schedule) by 4pm. No late submissions will be accepted, resulting in a loss of SIX points to the overall grade.

Your discussion paper/post should consist of a well thought out answer to the question. If a student's answer does not meet the guidelines, a loss of SIX points will be applied to your grade.

### 2. Exams 60 points (30 Points each)

There will be two non-cumulative in-class exams, both consisting of multiple choice style questions. The questions will be based on class materials, including book material, article readings and film material.

Exam 1: Friday March 17<sup>th</sup>

Exam 2: Friday May 12<sup>th</sup>

### 3. Professionalism 10 Points

#### A. Professional conduct in the online classroom

- Students are expected to attend all online class activities
- Students should have read all assigned readings and be prepared for questions regarding the readings assigned for the day.
- Debate and discussion are expected, but should be conducted respectfully, and in a manner consistent with political science principles. Make sure that any comments are academic in nature and supported by research, not merely based on opinion.
- For more information, see UB's classroom [code of conduct](#) and [rules and regulations](#).

#### B. Utilizing the Syllabus

- It is the student's responsibility to be able to access and understand the requirements and expectations of the course.
- If you have questions concerning the administrative part of the course, refer to the syllabus.
- Failing to meet this responsibility will result in a loss of professionalism points.

**C. Professional conduct in e-mails**

- To ensure I receive your email, include PSC 215 as the subject line
- E-mailing is a formal method of communication; all emails should be written professionally. Disregarding the following guidelines will result in lost professionalism points:

**Subject: PSC 215**  
[Greeting] Prof. Tillman,

Subject Matter

Thank you,  
[Your Name (First and Last)]

*If this format is NOT followed with email communication, the consequences include loss of professionalism points. I reserve the right to not respond to any email communication that does not include this format.*

**IV. Grading**

Grades will be posted to UBLearns throughout the semester, make sure that you monitor your progress. Any questions regarding a specific grade will need to be addressed within one week from the date the grade is posted.

I cannot grade you on anything other than the points you have earned in this course. It is not fair to the class to grade some students on different terms than others. Outside factors that I cannot weigh in to your course grade include:

- Needing to pass this course or receive a certain grade to graduate
- Your work schedule
- Your course load

These issues should be discussed with your [Academic Advisor](#) through UB's College of Arts and Sciences. They can connect you with resources to address these concerns.

**Grading Scheme**

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	F
94-100	90-93	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	67-69	61-66	0-60

**Grade Calculator**

There are 100 possible points that can be achieved throughout the semester. 'Total Points' is the sum of the points you have earned throughout the semester, this is your final grade. Any extra credit points can be added on directly to the Total Points you have achieved.

To determine your grade at a particular time or to see how a future assignment will impact your grade, you can use the posted grades on UBLearns and this grading calculator to sum your total points earned (“Your Grade”) out of the total points possible.

Assignment	Your grade		Total Possible Points
Discussion Board Question #1	_____	/	<b>6</b>
Discussion Board Question #2	_____	/	<b>6</b>
Discussion Board Question #3	_____	/	<b>6</b>
Discussion Board Question #4	_____	/	<b>6</b>
Discussion Board Question #5	_____	/	<b>6</b>
Exam 1	_____	/	<b>30</b>
Exam 2	_____	/	<b>30</b>
Participation/ Professionalism	_____	/	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Points</b>	_____	/	<b>100</b>

## V. Missed Exams

In the case of emergencies, accommodations will be made for students who notify me before the exam or assignment is due. In extenuating circumstances, students may have up to 24 hours after the missed exam or assignment to notify the instructor.

Students must provide appropriate documentation within 2 days of the missed exam/assignment. Upon receipt of documentation, the make-up exam/assignment will be distributed to the student.

- Beyond documented emergencies, no make-ups will be granted for missed exams.
- Beyond documented emergencies, no make-up assignments or extensions can be granted on ANY assignment as other students are dependent on your timely submissions.
- It is your responsibility to make sure that you are able to access the course materials (UBLearns) and submit assignments on UBLearns. If you are having difficulties, you must be in communication with the UBLearns support team and have informed me BEFORE the due date.
- Any submitted assignment that does not meet the standards of college level work will be returned for resubmission. Returned assignments are subject to point deductions for being late, starting the day following the request for resubmission.

## VI. Academic Integrity

Absolutely no academic dishonesty will be tolerated in this course. For more information on what constitutes as academic dishonesty, please familiarize yourself with [UB's policies](#).

[Plagiarism](#) is the copying of text or ideas from a source without citing that source. It is easily preventable through proper citing. Guidelines can be found [here](#) and [here](#). All submissions will be run through UBLearns' plagiarism detection software, SafeAssign through UBLearns. Plagiarism or cheating on your assignments or exams will result in a zero on that assignment.

## VII. Special Needs

Students with special needs should bring their needs to my attention within the first two weeks of class. Information on available services can be found on UB's Accessibility Resources [site](#).

The demands of college and other life events can be challenging and stressful. Students dealing with stress-related problems or other crisis should be aware of the services provided by [UB's Counseling Center](#). [The Wellness Center](#) also provides many useful services.

**This syllabus is subject to change.**

## VIII. Course Schedule

**Week 1: 1/30 – 2/3**

Syllabus Review

Reading: Chapter 1

Topic: An Overview of the American Legal System

**Week 2: 2/6 – 2/10**

Reading: Chapter 2

Topic: Foundations and Functions of Law

**Discussion Post #1 Due by 4pm on Friday February 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 3: 2/13 – 2/17**

Reading: Chapter 3

Topic: The Courtroom Work Group

**Week 4: 2/20 – 2/24**

Reading: Chapter 4

Topic: Judges

**Week 5: 2/27 – 3/3**

Reading: Chapter 5

Topic: Lawyers and Litigants

**Week 6: 3/6 – 3/10**

Reading: Chapter 6

Topic: Jurors, Witnesses, and Others in the Judicial Process

**Discussion Post #2 Due by 4pm on Friday March 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 7: 3/13 – 3/17**

Study for Exam 1

**Exam 1 Friday March 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 8: 3/20 – 3/24**

Spring Break, No Class

**Week 9: 3/27 – 3/31**

Reading: Chapter 7

Topic: Trials and Trial Procedures

**Week 10: 4/3 – 4/7**

Reading: Chapter 8

Topic: Sentencing

**Discussion Post #3 Due by 4pm on Friday April 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 11: 4/10 – 4/14**

Reading: Chapter 9

Topic: Courts of Limited Jurisdiction and Specialized Courts

**Week 12: 4/17 – 4/21**

Reading: Chapter 10

Topic: Courts of General Trial Jurisdiction

**Week 13: 4/24 – 4/28**

Reading: Chapter 11

Topic: Courts of Appellate Jurisdiction

**Discussion Post #4 Due by 4pm on Friday April 28<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 14: 5/1 – 5/5**

Reading: Chapter 12

Topic: Addressing the Problems and Crafting Solutions

**Discussion Post #5 Due by 4pm on Friday May 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 15: 5/8 – 5/12**

Study for Exam 2

**Exam 2 Friday May 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 16: 5/15 – 5/19**

Finals Week, No Class

Good Luck on Finals and Congratulations to anyone Graduating